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April 2022

Planting of mangrove seedlings at Kalota, Tana River Delta.
PHOTO: JENNIFER ODERO

Forests: "Lungs for Kenya" in danger

Forests sustain life on earth. Trees take in the carbon dioxide that animals produce as waste. Trees give us the oxygen we need to live. Forests help to moderate the climate. Near forests, hot days are less hot, and cold nights less cold, than in open areas. By storing carbon dioxide, forests help to regulate the gases in the atmosphere around the earth. This helps to slow down climate change. Forests catch, store, clean, and release water. Water from forests flows to hydro-electric power plants, producing electricity. Trees enrich the soil and protect it from erosion. Many forests are sites for cultural or religious ceremonies.

Forest trees produce wood and poles for houses, furniture, fences, power lines, paper, tools and works of art. Wood from forests is used as firewood or charcoal. In Kenya 90% of rural households use firewood and charcoal as the main sources of cooking energy. Forests give us non-timber forest products such as medicinal plants, gums and resins, fibres for ropes, seeds for ornaments, fruits and honey from forest flowers. Traditionally, pastoralist peoples conserved forests, in order to use them for grazing in times of drought. They moved the cattle out of the forest once the drought was over.

However, the Kenya parliament does not seem to recognize these critical forest values. The parliament has programmed to discuss an amendment to the Forest Act that if passed will reduce the Kenya Forest Service to a spectator on decisions on forest boundary alterations. On 21st March 2022, Nature Kenya joined other stakeholders on the International Day of Forests to mobilize objection to the Forest Amendment Bill 2021. The day was set aside by the United Nations to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of forests. If you have not yet signed our petition to reject the proposed Bill please do so here: https://bit.ly/3nGHtdL.

To mark the International Day of Forests, our Species and Sites manager Paul Gacheru appeared on a KBC Channel-one live television talk show giving an account of what Nature Kenya is doing to conserve forests. At the site level, four site support groups (SSGs) marked the day in Mt. Kenya, Tana River Delta, Kakamega and Arabuko-Sokoke forests.

Other forest restoration activities took place in March. Our *Lungs for Kenya* charity golf tournament was held at the Karen Country Club on Friday, 25th March. The event attracted 132 golfers and raised funding to plant 27,000 trees in degraded forest landscapes in Kenya.

Mt Kenya forest was attacked by fierce wildfires. Nature Kenya donated supplies, including foodstuffs, to the Ontulili Community Forest Association (CFA) that supported fire-fighting efforts in Mt. Kenya.

In Taita Hills, Nature Kenya, in partnership with Kenya Forest Service (KFS), trained Vuria and Chawia CFAs on participatory forest management. These CFAs are ready to restore 20 Ha of degraded areas in Taita Hills forest fragments. CFA members will also plant 10 Ha of fruit trees including avocado and macadamia for livelihood and carbon sequestration on farms.

In Tana River, Mpozi Community Forest Association (CFA) restored 4 ha of degraded mangrove areas at Kalota and Baraka Saba using 39 kgs of seeds previously collected. Nature Kenya is supporting the establishment of the Shakako Community Conservancy, with 16 village meetings held towards this in March 2022.

In April 2022, membership activities will continue in adherence to the easing Covid-19 protocols as follows:

1. The 112th Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place virtually by Zoom on Thursday 28th April 2022 from 10 a.m to noon.
2. Wednesday Morning Birdwalks and Third Sunday Birdwatch in Nairobi and Thursday afternoon and Fourth Saturday bird walks in Malindi continue with caution.
3. A members' talk titled 'Pesticides use and emerging economies: What does the data say?' will take place virtually in April.
4. The Nature Kenya Sales and Membership office will be open to members on weekdays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Please wear masks, sanitize and keep a social distance.
5. Online membership functions to continue: membership can be renewed online http://naturekenya.org/support/membership/ or via M-Pesa. Books, honey, etc. may be purchased online or with M-Pesa (Paybill 100300, account "books" or "honey") and collected from the membership office between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.
6. Members will continue to receive an electronic version of the Nature Net. A hard copy of Nature Net can be posted or collected from the office by request to nkmembership@naturekenya.org or by telephone on 0726134029.
7. The Nature Kenya conservation office remains closed. Physical conservation meetings in Nairobi and other Covid hotspots are to be attended taking caution.
8. The EANHS/NMK Library is open. Museum galleries and sites are open to the public under Ministry of Health guidelines.

For clarifications or to report your observations on species and sites, kindly contact us through email:office@naturekenya.org or telephone: 020 3537568, 0780 149200, 0751 624312, 0771 343138.

Dr Paul Matiku,
Executive Director, Nature Kenya – the East Africa Natural History Society

112TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

DATE: Thursday 28th April 2022
TIME: 10:00 AM - Noon
VIA: Zoom virtual meeting

The Agenda

1. Minutes of the 111th Annual General Meeting
2. Matters arising from the Minutes
3. Chairman's Report
4. Honorary Treasurer's Report
5. Appointment of Auditor
6. Any other business of which due notice in the form of the Resolution to be proposed has been given to the Honorary Secretary, signed by not less than 2 members, not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting.
7. Election of Office Bearers, Members of the Executive Committee and Trustees. Nomination forms for officers or members of the Executive Committee are available from nkmembership@naturekenya.org
8. Report by Committees, Projects, Library and Journal

To register for the virtual AGM in advance, please click **here**.

Saving Biodiversity: the world is trying to increase ambition

The world is trying to increase its ambition for safeguarding biodiversity. It is known that US$ 700 billion is needed annually. It is claimed that harmful subsidies worth US$ 500, especially in agriculture, need to be removed through sustainable pathways. If subsidies are removed, then US$ 200 billion annually is what will be required to finance the conservation of biodiversity.

If the world cannot be managed sustainably, more than US$ 700 billion must become available to deal with unsustainable production, including trade. Consumption patterns in developed countries are responsible for 50% of the threats to biodiversity in developing countries – mainly due to trade involving conversion of biodiversity habitats into commodities exported to wealthy recipient countries.

International negotiations are not easy. Every government agrees that there is a problem and urgent solutions are needed. However, when governments meet and negotiations start, each party maintains a stance that makes it difficult to converge to an agreement.

Nature Kenya Director Paul Matiku is a member of the Africa Group of Negotiators. As part of the Kenya Delegation to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) preparation meetings – Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), Subsidiary Body on Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and Open-ended Working Group on Implementation – between 14th to 29th March 2022, Dr Matiku developed the Africa position on Resource Mobilization.

The Africa position calls for all countries to set aside 1% of their GDP (Gross Domestic Product) to raise the US$ 700 billion including US% 500 billion for removal of harmful subsidies. The position for Kenya and Africa also calls for equity by requesting the developed countries to contribute US$ 100 billion annually to developing countries as grants to help to protect biodiversity. Kenya also requests parties to agree to 1% of retail being contributed to biodiversity funds.

The CBD preparatory meetings in Geneva ended on 29th March 2022 without agreement. There has been a great deal of negotiations but the documents, in particular the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, is full of brackets. As a result, the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework has proposed to hold yet another meeting in Nairobi from 21st to 26th June 2022 to further promote consensus on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Unfortunately, biodiversity conservation is no longer about vision and passion, but financing. The Convention on Biological Diversity's 15th Conference of Parties (CoP) is to be held in Kunming, China in August 2022, subject to Covid. Will the world agree on an ambitious plan that is financed sufficiently to bend the curve and slow the loss of biodiversity? Please look at the international section of Nature Net each month for any updates.

Nature Kenya urges all governments of the world to ensure biodiversity action is transformative. Business as usual will not bend the curve.

GOLFING TO KEEP BREATHING

A golfer in action during the 'Lungs for Kenya' 2022 charity golf tournament at Karen Country Club. the tournament attracted 132 golfers and raised funds to plant 27,000 trees in Mt. Kenya forest. Africa Data Centres was the lead sponsor. Kenya Breweries Limited, Platinum Credit, Knight Frank, Davis and Shirtliff, Base Titanium, Williamson Tea, NCBA, Prime Bank, Syngenta, Kenya Forest Service and others also supported the event. We thank you all for the support. PHOTO: JOHN MWACHARO

A stingless bee (left) encounters a honey bee. PHOTO: DINO MARTINS

Bees without stings

By Matilda Gikonyo, Kathrin Krausa and Nelly Ndung'u

When you think of bees, the first things that comes to mind are yellow and black stripes, a buzzing sound, and the possibility of getting a painful sting. Can you imagine bees without a sting?

Actually, those do exist! Such bees are called *meliponines* or simply stingless bees. Worldwide, more than 600 species of stingless bees exist. However, only a fraction of them has been studied to date.

Stingless bees are distinguished from ordinary honey bees by their size, with meliponines being smaller, having reduced wing venation, and characteristically lacking a sting. This does not mean they are defenceless, as they are known to bite possible intruders.

Like honey bees, stingless bees are eusocial insects, forming perennial colonies that consist of a single queen, workers, and temporary males. In the wild, they build their nests in a variety of habitats such as tree cavities, holes in the ground, dead wood, cracks in stone or mud walls and abandoned termite nests.

Stingless bees play an important role in the environment as pollinators of various flowering plants, since they feed on pollen and nectar. Stingless bees have also shown potential as pollinators for agricultural systems. Some species have shown promising results in the pollination of vegetable crops such as capsicum, leading to an increase in their yields.

Besides pollinating plants, meliponines also produce honey. Their honey has a high medicinal value due to its antibiotic properties. Stingless bee honey is one of the most sought-after and highly-priced therapeutic natural products. Their propolis and wax also have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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Hunting down the deadly – It's a Snake Eagle's world

By Richard Kipng'eno

Snakes can't fly. So when they drop down from the sky, something is amiss, right? An incident that occurred in June 2021 in Kitui caused quite a stir. A man was bitten by a snake while driving. The snake landed on the car's roof and made its way inside through an open window. It then tangled around the man's arm and bit him.

Luckily, passersby came to the man's rescue, killing the snake and freeing him from the deadly grip. More drama ensued. As the passersby prepared to burn the dead snake, a large bird swooped, grabbed the snake and made away with it. The spectacle left many baffled. Social media platforms and news outlets were full of speculations, bordering from bizarre theories to superstition.

Being a bird enthusiast and naturalist, let me share some insights into the mysterious bird's action. Many reports indicate it was an eagle. The peculiar behaviour displayed by the bird is typical of a bird of prey. My guess is a Snake Eagle.

Snake Eagles, as the name suggests, specialize in hunting snakes. Like other eagles, Snake Eagles are agile, have a very sharp vision, and strong feet equipped with great curved talons. Additionally, a thick overlay of scales protects their feet from snake bites. Snake Eagles are medium-sized eagles with large rounded heads, striking yellow eyes, bare legs and an upright stance when perched.

A Snake Eagle hunts from a perch, or while soaring up in the skies. Once it spots prey on the ground, the eagle descends and snatches it, then quickly flies upwards. When it comes to hunting down some of the swiftest and deadliest snakes in the world, like cobras and black mambas, there is no room for errors. Neutralizing any potential harm comes first. The eagle crushes or rips off the serpent's head while airborne. It then swallows the entire snake, head first.

Occasionally, the snake may break free from the eagle's grip and drop to the ground. Such was the case in Kitui.

Several species of Snake Eagles occur in Kenya. They include the Black-chested, Brown, Southern Banded and Western Banded Snake Eagles and the rare Short-toed and Beaudouin's Snake Eagles. The Beaudouin's is listed as Vulnerable, and Southern Banded as Near Threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Indeed, eagles are fascinating birds of prey that display unique hunting skills. Unfortunately, many of these raptors are experiencing a decline in their populations. Habitat destruction, collision with energy infrastructure, hunting, and pollution are among contributors to the dwindling numbers. A lot needs to be done to keep these skilled, soaring hunters airborne.

Black-chested Snake Eagle.
PHOTO: CHARLES J. SHARP/ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The moon and holy days

By Fleur Ng'weno

April first is the new moon; the moon passes between the Earth and the sun during the day, and we can't see the sunlit part of the moon. This moon will determine Islamic, Christian and Hebrew holy days in April 2022.

When the slender crescent of the new moon is sighted on April 2, it will usher in the Muslim holy month of Ramadhan, a time of fasting and prayer. Ramadhan will end with the feast of Eid ul Fitr, when the next new moon is sighted on May 2. The timing of Ramadhan is based on a lunar calendar, rather than the solar calendar that is in everyday use.

In our solar calendar, the March equinox – when day and night are the same length, all over the world – was on March 20 this year. In 2022, the full moon following the equinox is on April 16. That determines the date of the Christian holy day of Easter, April 17 – the first Sunday after the first full moon after the equinox.

The moon also determines the date of the Jewish celebration of Passover, April 16 starting on the evening of April 15 – the fifteenth day of the first lunar month after the equinox.

Planets April '22

Mercury, nearest planet to the sun, appears as a small bright light over the sunset in mid-April, and climbs higher. At month's end Mercury appears close the star cluster called the Pleiades or Seven Sisters (in reality, the Pleiades stars are much further away).

The other planets are brilliant in the **morning sky**. Even in a well-lit town or city, you can see big, bright Venus before dawn, unless hidden by clouds or buildings. All month long, Venus is high in the east at dawn.

Saturn and Mars are above and to the right of Venus. Saturn passes Mars on April 5 and rises steadily. Reddish Mars is faint at first, brightening to become as bright as Saturn at month's end. Mars will continue to brighten as its orbit brings it closer to Earth during 2022.

Jupiter, low over the sunrise at first, rises all through April. At month's end Jupiter appears close to Venus. The waning crescent moon is near Saturn on April 25, near Mars on the 26th, and near Venus and Jupiter on the 27th.

April Stars

Sirius, the brightest star we see at night, is high in the southwest, and the second brightest star, Canopus, is low in the southwest. You may see several bright stars left of Sirius; can you imagine the shape of a dog, with Sirius as its bright eye?

Face south, find Sirius high in the sky, and look towards the west (to the right of Sirius). You can now imagine the constellation of Orion the Hunter walking towards the sunset. The ancient Greeks saw the three bright stars in a row as his belt, with a hanging sword of three faint stars in a row. Above the belt are two bright stars for his shoulders. One of them, Betelgeuse, shines with an orange glow. Below the belt and sword are two bright stars for his knees. The brighter one, Rigel, shines blue-green in colour.

The star Procyon is high overhead. The ancient Greeks imagined Sirius and Procyon as the two hunting dogs following Orion. Further north, the stars Castor and Pollux are in the constellation called Gemini, the Twins – like a long rectangle. The waxing moon is near Pollux on April 9.

The constellation Leo the Lion is high in the eastern sky. The bright star Regulus can be imagined as the heart – or the front paw – of the resting lion. North of Regulus, a half circle of stars forms the lion's mane. To the east, other stars seem to form the lion's back and tail. The moon is near Regulus on April 12 and near the blue-white star Spica on the 16th.

In the west, the Pleiades star cluster is dipping towards the sunset. The waxing crescent moon is near the Pleiades on April 4 and 5.

Meteor Showers

Meteors are bits of rock and dust from space that fall into the Earth's atmosphere and burn up with a flash. They are sometimes called shooting stars or burning spears. In April there are two meteor showers: the Lyrids, April 16-25, peaking April 22-23; and the Eta Aquarids (dust from Halley's Comet) April 19 to May 28, peaking May 6-7. Best viewing is from a dark location on a clear night after midnight.

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi
Please observe Covid-19 protocols as needed: wear or bring masks and meet at designated venues.

6th April, 2022 – Karura Forest. Meet at the Limuru Road entrance, Gate A, at 8:30am. We will then proceed to Amani parking. Thanks to Friends of Karura Forest for welcoming the birdwalk.

13th April, 2022 – Karen Blixen Museum. Meet at 8.30am in the Museum's Car Park area. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. Turn left at Shell Petrol Station onto Karen Road. The Museum is about 1.5Kms after Karen Country Club.

20th April, 2022 – Museum Grounds/Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

27th April, 2022 – Giraffe Centre. Meet at 8.30am at the Giraffe Centre main entrance. Thanks to AFEW for welcoming the birdwalk.

Sunday Birdwatch
April 17th Sunday Bird Watch – Brackenhurst. Meet at the Brackenhurst Main Gate at 8:30am. Directions: Drive along Limuru Road to Ruaka, take a right turn and continue straight along Banana Hill Road. Turn right at the two big white stones with signage, the gate is 1km ahead. Alternatively, take PSV number 106, 114 or 115 at the Khoja roundabout in Nairobi, alight at Brackenhurst gate. There is an entrance fee of **Ksh. 200** per adult and **Ksh. 100** per child below 12 years.

If you have questions, please write to news@naturekenya.org or phone 0780-149200.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds grounds usually take place on Tuesday mornings. Please confirm with Titus Imboma on Imbomati911@gmail.com or Phone 0721-649452.

Malindi Thursday Birdwalks
7th April 2022 – Mtangani via Light Academy. Meet at 4:00pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

14th April 2022 – Malindi shoreline via Sandpiper School road. Meet at 4:00pm outside Polaris shop, Malindi, opposite Naivas Supermarket.

21th April 2022 – Malindi Marine National Park. Meet at 4pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

28th April 2022 – Malindi Museum grounds and Shoreline to Vasco da Gama Pillar. Meet at 4:00pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Malindi Saturday Morning Birding 23rd April 2022 – Mtangani via Afya road. Meet at 7am at the Malindi Museum near the Nature Kenya office. The bird walk is likely to end at 11:30am

For more information, contact Amina Simba at malindimembers@naturekenya.org or aminasimba6@gmail.com or phone: 0725 223042.

Mombasa Birdwalks are held the 3rd Saturday of each month. To check meeting time and place, check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Or contact: Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540

or Kelvin Mazera <klvnrua@yahoo.com> / 0720-928783

Tree Walk
By Nature Kenya
Plants Committee
Venue: National Museums of Kenya
Meet at Nairobi Museum main gate
Date: Friday 29th April Time: 9:00 AM
Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283

PLEASE REPORT BIRD RINGS

Bird ringing is the placing of a small uniquely numbered ring on a bird's leg. Ringing has enabled us to work out the migration routes of many species as well as other information such as population changes. However, for us to find out these things, ringed birds need to be reported. That includes a photographed ring or a caught or dead bird wearing a ring.

Ideally, all ringed birds found in East Africa should be reported to the Ringing Scheme of Eastern Africa (ringing.eafrica@gmail.com). The Ringing Scheme maintains a central database of bird movements and recoveries. For us to be able to understand and protect our birds better we need all the info we can about them. Migration movements (origins, destinations, timing, duration, etc.) are all critical in understanding their biology and thus their needs for survival.

Please encourage anyone who finds a ringed bird or who photographs a ringed bird to report it to the Ringing Scheme. Many who find a bird from e.g. Poland will report direct to the Polish scheme. This is fine except that we would appreciate having the information for our own records. Please therefore cc any correspondence to the Ringing Scheme. ***Colin Jackson***

Send your birding records to:
Kenya Bird Map <http://kenya.birdmap.africa/>
If you have questions re KBM, write to <kenyabirdmap@naturekenya.org>

Stay updated with the birding scene in Kenya by signing in to the new **Kenyabirdsnet** platform on Google Groups at: https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet

After signing in you will be able to post your records at: kenyabirdsnet@googlegroups.com

Eurasian Nightjar spotted at Michuki Memorial Park. PHOTO: SURAT MOHAMED

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- Confirm details & press OK

For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org